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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the history and trauma of Native education in Canada and stresses the importance of integrating the best of the Native culture with the best of the Western culture in future Native education. The paper is organized in three parts. The first section acknowledges the trauma inflicted on the indigenous peoples by means of early and contemporary Native education from the 1600s to the 1900s. Educational practices during this time purposefully denied and ignored the value of Native culture in an unsuccessful attempt to assimilate American Indians into the Euro-Canadian society. Native education remained essentially unchanged until the Federal Government of Canada accepted a proposal in 1973 by the National Indian Brotherhood. This new education policy radically changed Native education by affirming the Native culture and encouraging Euro-Canadians to share in the value of Native culture. The second section of the paper proposes a theory of context. This theory was used to analyze external and internal conditions affecting education during the 1950s through 1970s. It was found that macro conditions of society--political, social, and economic--do affect micro elements such as student achievement. Based upon this theory the last section of this paper speculates upon the next 100 years of Native education in Canada. If Native education is going to be successful, Native culture and knowledge need to be revived and integrated into modern society. This would allow for harmony and respect to exist between all people. Native people cannot do without the strengths of the Western world, which includes science and technology; whereas the Western world desperately needs the strength in the area of human relations, that the Native worldview and value system, characterized by respect between all living things, can supply. (Contains 16 references.) (LP)

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NATIVE EDUCATION: THE NEXT 100 YEARS

A presentation to the 100th anniversary

of

CANADIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

CALGARY, ALBERTA

September 25, 1991

by

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NATIVE EDUCATION: THE NEXT 100 YEARS

INTRODUCTION

Amongst the Nuu-chah-nulth (people dwelling along the mountains) of the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, there is an ancient tradition that may be roughly translated as 'sweeping away the badness'. It is a tradition intended to deal effectively with personal (as in individual), community, and intercommunity trauma, near tragedies, and the like, by gathering together and publicly acknowledging the unfortunate event of the past and then purposefully, ritually, and publicly putting it away by 'sweeping away the badness'. This tradition of 'sweeping away the badness' is one of the many expressions of a culture whose worldview and value system ensured, among other things, a healthy balance between individual and group rights which in turn produced relatively healthy and harmonious communities. While the intervention created by the advent of the European has changed Native traditional thought and practice, vestiges of ancient traditions and customs are still evident in many Native communities today. It is in the spirit of the ancient Nuu-chah-nulth tradition of 'sweeping away the badness' that this paper is presented to the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Education Association. The history of Native education in Canada has been a trauma, the effects of which, may be felt for some time to come. However, the time has also come to begin to 'sweep away the badness', to acknowledge the trauma of the past and begin, at this juncture of our history, to attempt to harmonize the best of the Native with the best of the Western. The task is formidable. How can hundreds of years of destructive misunderstanding be turned into constructive understanding? How can hundreds of years of misdirected learning be unlearned and replaced with appropriately directed learning? It may not be possible in this generation, it may not be possible at all, but if a few of us have a vision of human beings travailing to bring about harmony between themselves in this country, there may be a faint spark of hope for our future. The effort may be overwhelming, but it is certainly a worthy one.

This paper has three sections. The first section acknowledges the trauma of Native education from the 1600s to the 1900s. The second section is a summary of my dissertation completed in 1990 at the University of British Columbia in which the theory of context was developed. The theory is based upon the traditional worldview of Native people which may be simplistically termed 'holistic'. It is a view of reality which assumes that the universe is one and that everything in it is related, connected, and infused with life by a Creator. It is the very antithesis of the assumptions which underlie this scientific age

where reality is assumed to be composed of unrelated material, not all of which, has been infused with life. The theory of context has been found useful in the discussion about the history of Native education and it is anticipated that it may also be useful in a discussion about the future of Native education which makes up the final section of this paper.

THE TRAUMA OF NATIVE EDUCATION

This section is in two parts. The first part is about early Native education and the second part is about contemporary Native education. The discussion is not comprehensive but is intended to summarize prevailing conditions in the relationship between the Native people and the newcomers to this land. It is also intended to provide a different view of reality, a different interpretation about the value of Native culture than was brought by the European.

Early Native Education: 1600s-1900s

Barman, Hebert and McCaskill (1986) assert that, historically, there was a difference in attitude between the Indian and European. "For the most part," they write, "the aboriginal population accepted the new arrivals at face value, while the Europeans assumed the superiority of their culture over that of any aboriginal peoples. Out of that misconception grew the European conviction that in order for the Indians to survive, they would have to be assimilated into the European social order" (p.2). A principal vehicle of assimilation is education, and the prevailing European attitude found a reflection in one of the first recorded Native education policy statements penned in 1632 by a Jesuit missionary. He wrote:

> Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but of weaning them from the habits and feelings of their ancestors, and the acquirements of the language, arts, and customs of civilized life. (cited in Vallery, 1942, p.114)

With such a beginning Native education was destined for trauma. No amount of good intention, pure motivation, or altruism, could lessen the trauma of this early Native education policy statement. It is the very antithesis of sound educational theory and practice today. It assumes that the Native student has nothing to offer, no mental ability, no previous mental training, no habits, feelings, language, arts, and customs worthy of preserving or nurturing. Native self-esteem was not to begin at zero or from a neutral state but from a severe deficit. Thousands of years of Native wisdom, values, knowledge, habits,

thoughts, customs, traditions, in personal and community harmony were to be extirpated, destroyed, denied, until the Native student emerged a 'born again' European. Fortunately for the Native the policy failed more often than not. Nevertheless, four methods or conditions were employed by the French and three by the English in an attempt to successfully implement this education policy. The only essential difference between the French and English treatment of Native education is that the English did not attempt to educate an 'Indian elite' in England. The following are the four methods or conditions:

1) Education in the mission field
2) Education of an Indian elite in France
3) Education on reserves
4) Education in boarding schools

Even if one knows nothing about the history of Native education except its policy, any contemporary educator could predict massive failure for the Native student, or for any student subjected to the same kind of education policy. In 1688, Mother de l'Incarnation expressed the frustration of Native education failure by typically attributing cause to the 'Savage' nature of the Native student. She observed:

> It is however a very difficult thing, although not impossible, to francize or civilize them. We have had more experience in this than any others, and we remarked that out of a hundred that have passed through our hands scarcely have we civilized one. We find docility and intelligence in them, but when we are least expecting it they climb over our enclosure and go to run the woods with their relatives, where they find more pleasure than in all the amenities of our French houses. Savage nature is made that way; they cannot be constrained, and if they are they become melancholy and their melancholy makes them sick. Besides, the Savages love their children extraordinarily and when they know that they are sad they will do everything to get them back, and we have to give them back to them. (cited in Jaenen, 1986, p.58)

The indication is that the rate of success in early Native education began at about one out of every hundred. Alternatively, it may be said that the rate of failure in early Native education began at 99 percent. The cause of failure is not attributed to policy or practice but to the savage nature of the Native student. Even when early Native education achieved its objective it became a dubious achievement as indicated in the following account of a young Native student sent to France for five years of studies in French and Latin:

> When he returned to his native country he had forgotten much of his Montagnais tongue and had missed all the instruction in woodcraft, hunting, fishing, and so forth, necessary to survival among his own people. The Jesuits took him under their wing, had him instructed in his Montagnais tongue, and employed him for a brief period as a language teacher. He was

> a "lost soul" caught between two worlds, in neither of which he felt at home. The Relations commented that "this poor wretch has become a barbarian like the others"; in fact, he had become an alcoholic, would enter into at least five unsuccessful marriages, and was a complete misfit among those the missionaries referred to as the "barbarians". It was reported that he had finally starved to death in the northern forests--a further indication of his inability to fit back into a traditional way of life. (Jaenen, 1986, p.50)

The quotation above could easily generate volumes of commentary and many other examples could be given of the futility of early Native education but it is not the intention of this paper to dwell too much upon the trauma of those early years. Because Native education policy remained essentially unchanged for several centuries the education outcome also remained essentially unchanged for several centuries despite the employment of various methods or conditions of education. One of the methods, namely the boarding school or residential school method has received a lot of media attention recently focussing upon the abuse suffered by Native students at these schools. Native people today are still reeling from the effects of education policy first conceived and penned during the 1600s. This concludes this brief sketch of early Native education. The next part of this paper deals with the contemporary history of Native education.

The Contemporary History of Native Education; 1949 to 1991

Persson (1986) has done a study entitled "The Changing Experiences of Indian Residential Schooling: Blue Quills, 1931 - 1970". It is evident from this and other studies and reports that Native children in general were rather consistent over time in their response to Native education. They kept failing and they kept running away from school. Although social, political and economic conditions and relationships changed over time, the dismal out come of Native education remained the same. Persson states that an Indian agency report of 1943 had the following entry, "six boys did run away last night during 15 below weather and arrived on the Saddle Lake Reserve, two with badly frozen feet and one with slightly frozen feet, it was lucky that two did not freeze to death" (p.156). In another case a former pupil recalls as follows:

> I was about 12 or 13 when I ran away. We got to our place about 11:30 at night and my mother couldn't believe it. So they took us back the very next morning. The three of us were taken back and that night got a licking. I had welts all over. They had a big strap with little fringes and to top it off all the girls were in their rightful places praying for me. I said, "I'm going to run away again." When I got home my mother really felt bad and they brought me to the agency and showed my marks to the Indian agent. He said he'd look into it. (cited in Persson, 1986, p.154)

Although the behaviour of the Native students remains essentially the same over time the relationship between the Native and Euro-Canadian has radically altered in social, political and economic terms. Whereas Mother de l'Incarnation reported that she had to return Native children upon demand Persson's study indicates a significant powershift whereby the authority over Native children shifted from the Native parents to the Government of Canada. The historian, Patterson (1972), in his history of the Canadian Native, confirms that from about 1500 to the present the Natives have "moved from a position of autonomy to one of loss of control in most if not all of the major areas of their lives" (p.187). Moreover, he states that, "At the time of first contact, Indians were treated as separate states or nations" (p.1). He might have added that the European nations had no choice but to treat the Indians as separate states or nations because that is in fact what they were. Trigger (1988) agrees and notes that:

> In histories of Canada written prior to the 1840s Indians played a prominent role and were treated respectfully. This reflected the actual significance of native people, who as trappers and traders were important to the Canadian economy and who, with the exception of the Iroquois prior to 1701 and the Micmacs in the late eighteenth century, were allies of successive French and British governments in their struggles against the English colonists and later the Americans to the south (p.19-20).

However, one may assume that Native children ran away from school, not for political reasons but for cultural reasons. Native children simply preferred Native culture over European culture, Native language, arts, customs, habits, thoughts, and feelings over European expressions of the same. Mother de l'Incarnation expressed this clearly. Unfortunately for the Native people the initial Native education policy statement penned during the 1600s remained unchanged while the Native people became, through many circumstances and events, a powerless people. The weight of European science and technology, European diseases, European social, political and economic exclusion, European propaganda about cultural superiority took its toll upon some aspects of the Native belief system. One of these had to do with education goals. Native people began to believe that the Euro-Canadian education system was the only system for them. Eventually the Euro-Canadian education system did become the only system for Native people. But until the 1970s the problem of education policy remained unchanged. In 1973 the Federal Government of Canada accepted a proposal by the then National Indian Brotherhood entitled 'Indian Control of Indian Education'. The proposal reversed, turned upside down, radically altered Native education policy that had persisted for 400 hundred years. Rather than deny the value of Native culture the new education policy affirmed it, rather than exclude Euro-Canadians the new education policy invited them to share in its richness, rather than

promote the superiority of one culture over another the new education policy indicated an attitude of mutual respect. The new education policy reflected ancient Native traditions of always seeking ways to harmonize the environment, the world. The effects of the new Native education policy in part prompted my dissertation completed in 1990. This is the subject of discussion in the next section.

THE THEORY OF CONTEXT

The theory of context arose out of my thesis entitled "Grade 12 Enrolments of Status Indians in British Columbia: 1949-1985". When placed on a graph the Grade 12 enrolments when proportionalized to band populations over time look like this.

SHOW OVERHEAD HERE (see appendix A)

For purposes of analysis Housego's (1980) divisions of this time frame into three periods, the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s onward was found convenient because each period has different characteristics. The theory of context uses these differences to explain events over time.

The theory assumes that education takes place in, and is affected by, a context of conditions both external and internal to education. The external factors assumed to affect student achievement are the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions while the internal factors assumed to affect student achievement are curriculum and education personnel. It was hypothesized that when external conditions were negative that this would have a negative impact upon student achievement while positive conditions were expected to be associated with academic achievement. The results of the study supported the hypotheses and thereby lent some credence to the theory of context.

The raw data graphed in Figure 1 (appendix A) was subjected to Time Series Analysis. The analysis found that the estimated average grade 12 enrolment change during the 1950s ranges between seven and ten students, while during the 1960s and 1970s the enrolment change ranges between eleven and thirteen. In contrast, the years 1982-1983 yield an estimated and significant increase of an estimated grade 12 enrolment change of twenty five students. The enrolment change from 1949 to 1981 ranged from seven to thirteen and then jumped markedly to twenty five for 1982 and 1983. Table 1 (see appendix B) is another method of analysis to show the trend of grade 12 enrolments over time. There is a very marked difference between the first and last periods, 561 total grade 12 enrolment for the 1950s and 4,256 grade 12 enrolment for the final period. When the first twenty four years is averaged the result is 1,283 students as compared with 4,256

students in the final period. These results were then contextualized by the prevailing conditions of each period.

Table 2 (see appendix B)summarizes both the prevailing external conditions and internal conditions of Native education over the three respective periods. The external conditions of the 1950s were chiefly characterized by negative social, political and economic conditions that could be described as exclusive. For example, Native people during the 1950s did not have the federal franchise and so were excluded from the national political arena. It was not until 1960, under Prime Minister Diefenbaker, that Native people were accorded the right to vote in federal elections. In one study conducted in British Columbia during the 1950s, Hawthorn, Belshaw & Jamieson (1958) found, in general, a very negative view of Native people by the dominant society. Native people were characterized by Whites during this period as "lazy, shiftless, and irresponsible" (p.74), of a low intellectual capacity and without "the potential to develop as rapidly as Whites along the lines of social, emotional, educational, moral or economic attainment" (p.70). Dosman (1972) has stated that up until the 1970s the evidence of Native poverty and exclusion from society was so overwhelming that its existence is unquestioned. The practical application of exclusion during this period meant that Native people were excluded from public places such as hotels, motels, restaurants, apartments, rental housing, and much of the job market and general participation within Canadian society (Wolcott, 1967; Jack, 1970, Moran, 1988).

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s the internal conditions of Native education reflected the external conditions. When the prevailing external conditions were negative so were the internal conditions, as the external conditions moved through a transition period during the 1960s towards the more positive conditions of the 1970s, so too did the internal conditions. For example, in concert with the Native education policy change, there were changes in curriculum and teacher characteristics. The devaluation of Native culture in earlier curriculum gave way to an affirmation of Native culture during the final period of the study.

It may be tentatively concluded that the theory of context has been given some credence. It does appear that the macro conditions of society do affect micro elements. A political act by the National Indian Brotherhood helped to change education policy, which in turn helped to change the internal conditions of Native education, which in turn helped to improve Native academic achievement. Since the theory of context is based upon traditional views of reality which survived unrelenting attempts at deliberate cultural genocide it may prove helpful in the next section in speculating about the next 100 years of Native education.

THE NEXT 100 YEARS

In the tradition of the Nuu-chah-nulth, unfortunate events of the past have been acknowledged in public. In the same tradition there remains an agreement to 'sweep away the badness' and restore a semblance of harmony to our world. It is the great challenge between Canadians that is currently being enacted. Part of that process has begun already by the Native education policy change which allowed local control of education and allowed for an affirmation of Native culture. Inherent in the new policy and practice is an acknowledgement of human dignity and respect between the Native and members of the larger society. In the area of Native education it is a beginning for the next 100 years. The theory of context helped to explicate the 'unfortunate events' of the past by contextualizing Native education within known prevailing social, political and economic conditions which unfailingly reflected conditions within the school system of each period. As the external prevailing conditions moved from negative to positive so too did the internal conditions of Native education. The critical variable for positive change appears to be in a stance between the Native and non-Native characterized by mutual respect.

In my view the greatest hope for Native education in the next 100 years is not to be found in Western culture, nor in any other contemporary culture, but in the best of the Native traditions which existed prior to the arrival of the European to the Americas. Within those traditions could be found a worldview and value system characterized by respect, not only between human beings but between all living things. The genius of the Native worldview and value system tended towards community harmony as well as environmental harmony wherein could be found a balance between individual and group rights. The first European observers commented again and again that no one was found begging or in need of shelter in any of the Native communities encountered no matter how poor the people or barren the country.

Now two problems present themselves. The first is the loss of cultural knowledge and the problem of reviving it. The second is the problem of integrating, or according to the theory of context, contextualizing traditional Native culture into modern society. Both the Native worldview and the theory of context assume that all things are connected and related, therefore it follows that the minority Native population of Canada must be contextualized within their larger social, political, and economic environment. If we are related and connected then our common task should be to strive to harmonize our common social, political, and economic environments out of mutual respect and concern.

If Native people can overcome the first problem by regaining some of the best of the traditional past then the second problem becomes possible if both the Native and non-Native

agree to work together in mutual respect. If history is any guide mutual respect between different groups of people does not seem possible. Whether harmony between the Native people and Canada is possible in the future remains to be seen. Whatever the case it does appear that both have a need for the strengths of the other. Native people cannot do without the strength of the Western world which is science and technology and the Western world desperately requires a strength in the area of human relations.

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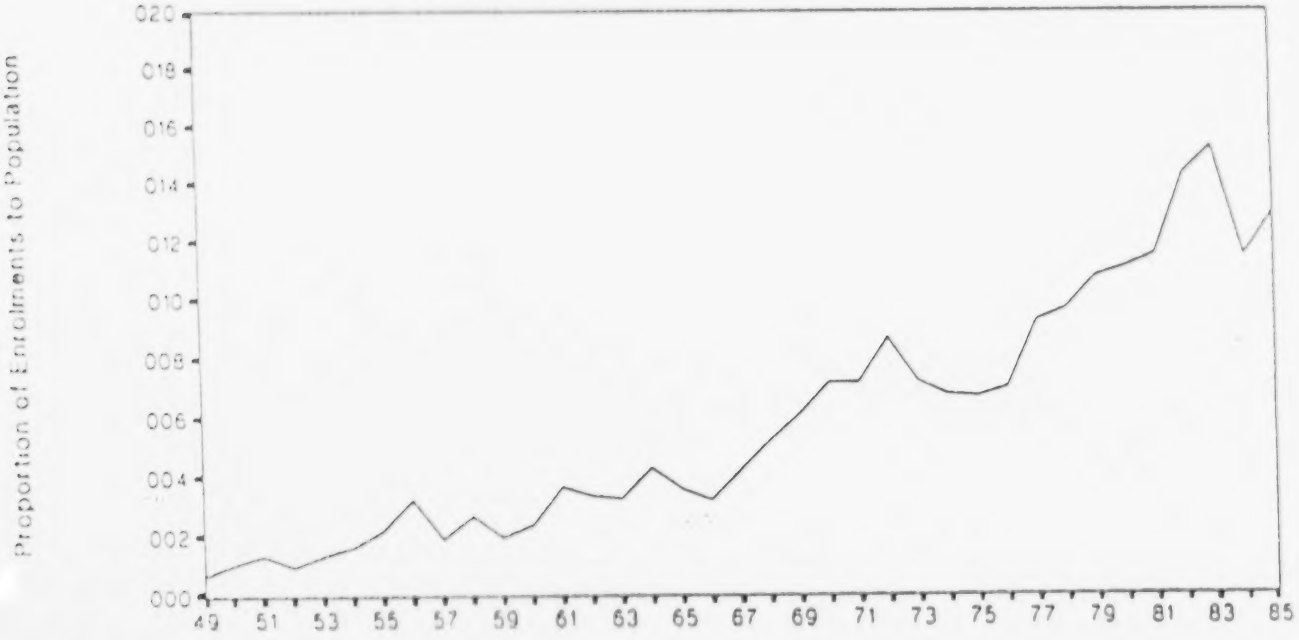
Figure 1
Grade 12 Enrolments of Status Indians in B.C.

1949 - 1985



Source Nominal Roll

APPENDIX B

Table 1			
Cumulative Grade 12 Enrolments in 12 Year Periods:1949-1985			
	1949-1960	1961-1972	1974-1985
Grade-12 Enrolment Totals	561	2005	3942
	The average for the first 24 yrs = 1283 students		vs 3942 students in the final 12 yrs

Table 2			
Cumulative Grade 12 Enrolments in 12 Year Periods:1949-1985 In Relation to the Social Orientation of Each Period			
	1949-1960	1961-1972	1974-1985
Social Orientations	Exclusive	Transitional	Inclusive
Grade-12 Enrolment Totals	561	2005	3942